Friend

My name -- at least, one of them -- is Al Levitt.

Jerry and I met shortly after World War II when we were both working at MGM. Jerry was married to Nancy. Their son, Jeff, was a small child about the same age as our son, Tom. We quickly became close friends.

Jerry's office was next to mine, and he spent more time in mine than in his own. The reasons for his visits were almost always story problems -- which he almost always solved himself. Jerry was too gregarious to be able to sit in an office, alone, trying to think of something that would: a. satisfy Joe Pasternak -- and b. wouldn't turn Jerry's stomach.

That was not a small challenge.

We ~~quickly became close friends~~. Helen and I, and Jerry and Nancy, had dinner together almost every weekend. There were memorable Saturday night parties, and there were Sunday gatherings at their home in Brentwood; the men played volleyball and the women, of course, were stuck with the kids.

It was a more primitive time.

In 1951, when Helen and I were both blacklisted, our close relationship with the Davises suddenly ended. We were, I admit, very hurt. We didn't know that, at about the same time, Jerry's and Nancy's marriage was breaking up.

I became a photographer, and I had an assignment to shoot the opening of a new hotel in Las Vegas. I was given the seating plan of the "big room," and saw on it -- Marilyn Maxwell and husband. I hadn't seen Jerry in a long time, but I had read of his marriage to Marilyn.

It was irresistible. I worked my way around the room

and approached their table with Jerry's back to me. I raised the camera to my eye, and said "Miss Maxwell?"

She gave me -- and the camera -- a dazzling smile. I waited an extra moment, and Jerry turned to face me. His jaw dropped in surprise -- and I hit the flash button!

He wanted to talk, ~~but I had to cover the rest of my assignment~~. I gave him my room number.

The next day Jerry turned up ~~at my room~~. There were no preliminaries. He had a commitment at Paramount, here was the story problem. We discussed it at length. He said he'd visit me at my little studio on Highland Avenue, and we went about our differing obligations.

A few days later Jerry turned up as promised.

"Look," he said. "I've been giving this a lot of thought. Where could you find a better front than me -- and where could I find a better behind than you?"

That was hard to resist.

We worked together in his name quite successfully. After a while Jerry said his psyche couldn't handle taking sole credit for our joint work. He insisted that I choose a pseudonym, and that we become an official team.

I was against it. I felt that it would jeopardize his career if we were open collaborators. He dismissed that as my paranoia. He was very insistent, and I -- uneasily -- became Tom August.

Jerry's only worry was that Tom and Jerry ~~are~~ were cartoon characters -- and no one would take us seriously.

Our first scheduled meeting with a producer was at CBS Cinema Center. The producer didn't know me, so I felt relatively secure about the meeting. As we approached the building we were directed to, I suddenly halted and grabbed Jerry's arm.

"What's the matter?" he scowled.

"I just saw Tiger Fafara!"

"What's a Tiger Fafara?" Jerry asked, puzzled.

"He's a child actor," I explained. "He's in the Woodcraft Rangers group I lead, and he knows me as Al Levitt."

Jerry stared at me incredulously.

"I've heard of people being afraid of the FBI," he said, "but the Woodcraft Rangers?"

I giggled about that all through the meeting. We got the assignment anyway.

We did several scripts for that show, and were then asked to meet with the producer of a series done at Screen Gems. As we arrived at his office, the producer's secretary looked up at me and said: "Aren't you Al Levitt?"

I was stunned.

Jerry said "Yes, he is." And ran out of the room!

"What's the matter?" the secretary asked, bewildered.

"He -- he hasn't been feeling well," I stammered. "We'll have to cancel today. We'll call and make another appointment as soon as we can. Incidentally," I added, "I no longer use Levitt. I'm now Tom August."

She nodded as though that was commonplace, and I left

to look for Jerry. I found him in the parking lot, sitting in his car, waiting for me.

"What happened?" I asked.

Jerry shrugged. "I panicked," he said.

From that point on we worked with relative calm, and turned out a lot of scripts. We started to get offers of staff jobs -- producing, story editing. I wasn't ready for that kind of "exposure," but I encouraged Jerry to accept a producing assignment, which he did. He became very good at it.

At that point our professional lives parted, but our friendship continued.

Jerry's talents included getting terrific women to marry him. Those of you ~~too young to have known~~ who didn't know Nancy and Marilyn missed two wonderful, unforgettable women. Many of you, of course, know Beryl -- D. Beryl Davis -- that myth-defying combination of beauty and intelligence.

If I've embarrassed her, I'll make up for it by reporting an evening Helen and I spent with Beryl and Jerry. She made coffee for the four of us, and did it very well -- except for one little detail. She forgot to put coffee in the coffee-maker.

Jerry is not a man whom one is likely to forget. The presence of so many of you here, today, testifies to that. ~~In addition~~, I think we all feel good about the fact that something of Jerry will live on in Jeffrey, Matthew, Josh, and Tony.

Pres of WGA, George Kirgo